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Souvenir of 

Sir Thomas Browne.

with

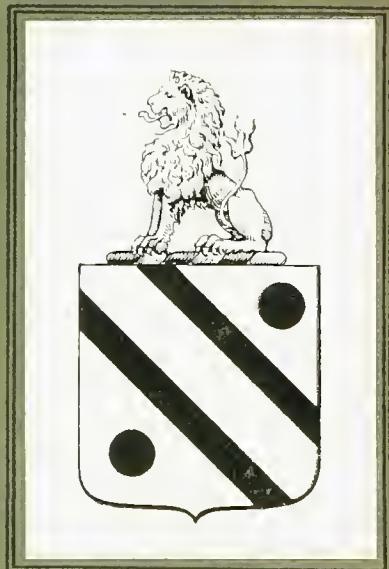
Twelve Illustrations and Notes

By

Chas. Williams, F. R. C. S. E.,

Norwich.

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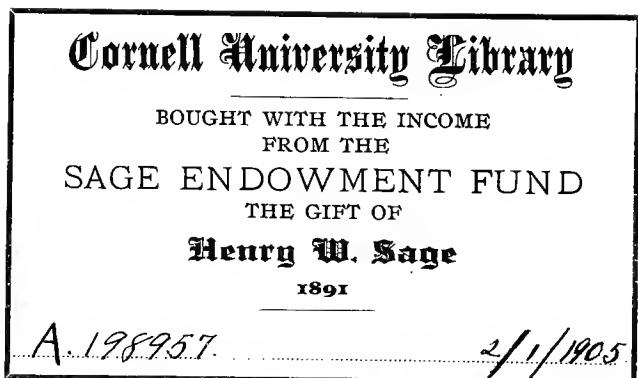
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and Notes by
CHAS. WILLIAMS, F.R.C.S.E.,
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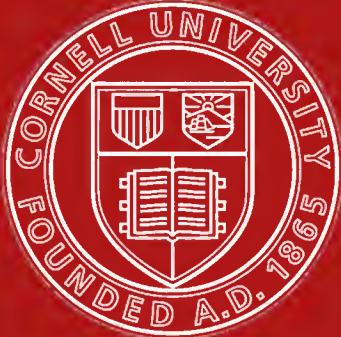
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Introduction.

Sir Thomas Browne was the most learned man that ever dwelt in the City of Norwich. We are informed by him that he was thoroughly conversant "with no less than six languages," that he had "not only seen several countries, beheld the nature of their climes, the chorography of the provinces, the topography of their cities, but understood their several laws, customs, and policies." This familiarity with foreign countries made Sir Thomas a citizen of the world in the largest sense, and the result was that no man could probably be less under the influence of national bias than he was. "I feel not in myself those common antipathies that I can discover in others; those natural repugnances do not touch me, nor do I behold with prejudice the natives of other countries, but where I find their actions in balance with my countrymen, I honour, love, and embrace them in the same degree."

He was a humorist; that must be evident enough to the reader of "Religio Medici," who will soon discover that he is dealing with one whose humour is irresistible, so much so, that it oozes through some of the gravest passages of that work.

He was no mean botanist. On this point he observes:—"I know most of the plants of my country and of those about me (Shibden-Dale), yet methinks I do not know so many as when I did but know a hundred, and had scarcely ever simpled further than Cheapside." Sir Thomas is now alluding to his boyhood which was spent in the parish of St. Michael-le-Quern, Cornhill.

The knowledge we possess of his intellectual abilities enables us to think of him not only as a philosopher, but as a naturalist and an antiquary, as well as a scholar.

The time had arrived when it was deemed fitting that some kind of honour should be paid to so distinguished a citizen; that duty has now been worthily executed in an appropriate and permanent manner.

The opportunity was thus afforded the writer of this Souvenir to issue a series of illustrations with descriptive notes, having reference to the life and times of Sir Thomas Browne; it is hoped that this small tribute will be appreciated by those who admire and venerate "the light of Norwich."

The Portrait of Sir Thomas Browne.

The oil painting of which this is a faithful representation is to be seen in the Church of St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich. It was formerly in the possession of Dr. Edward Howman, who resided in the house in which Sir Thomas Browne lived. The painting was presented by him to the parish about the year 1739.

It is well known that there are in existence three portraits of the great man, all of them situated in cities intimately associated with his life.

The portrait in the Bodleian Library at Oxford was given, in 1735, by Mr. Humphrey Bartholomew, M.A., together with a collection of 50,000 pamphlets. It was at this University that Sir Thomas Browne, in his eighteenth year, entered in 1623 as a fellow-commoner at Broadgates Hall, which was soon after endowed as a College, and named after William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, the Chancellor of the University and High Steward of Norwich Cathedral, a friend of Shakespeare, whom Shakespeare calls "Lord of my love," "My all the world," and "Time's best jewell." Sir Thomas Browne was chosen to deliver the first oration at the opening of the new College; he was then a student of only nine months' standing,

The next portrait is situated in the Royal College of Physicians, London, of which Sir Thomas was an Honorary Fellow, and to which it was presented by Dr. Edward Browne.

The third is at Norwich, the city in which he practised as a physician for forty-six years. It was most probably painted by a Mr. H. Morland, a portrait painter living in Norwich at that time, and well known to Sir Thomas Browne. The face is very perfect, the features as fresh as if painted yesterday. On this point Walter Pater says: "A dreamy sweetness of character we may find expressed in his very features."

The three pictures were, in all probability, painted about the same period; the Bodleian at the end of 1671, or the beginning of 1672, when he was sixty-six years of age; the Norwich one subsequently. They all represent him as being past the middle period of life. His portrait has been engraved by five English and three Dutch Artists.

He is described as being remarkably handsome, and "to have possessed in a singular degree the blessings of a grave and yet cheerful countenance. His virtues were many and remarkably conspicuous; his probity such as gained him universal respect."



The Browne Family.

This interesting picture represents a group of the Browne Family. The father stands on the left, the mother is seated on the right; between them are the three daughters, quaintly attired, and on his mother's knee the future Sir Thomas, a little figure in close red cap, red coat, and white pinafore, clasping a black rabbit—a significant sign of his future position as a naturalist.

The painting is supposed to have been executed by a foreign artist, probably Dutch, inasmuch as the costume of the children is foreign, and besides this, a large number of Dutch artists, painters and engravers, settled in England at that period.

The painting is in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire, whose ancestor, the first Countess, was nearly related to Sir Thomas Browne's father, and it is reasonable to suppose that after his death in 1613, or after the marriage of his widow to Sir Thomas Dutton, that the picture may have then found its way to Devonshire House, Piccadilly. It has never been engraved.

In the same mansion is to be seen a painting of the Countess, whose features are considered to be precisely similar to those of her relative.



Shibden-Dale.

This vale, one of the most beautiful in the West Riding, extends south-east from Halifax for three miles. At the top of the dale formerly stood Upper Shibden Hall, the residence in which Sir Thomas Browne lived and wrote his wonderful work, "Religio Medici." Unfortunately the house is no longer in existence. The Rev. Bryan Dale (*Bradford Antiquary*, July, 1896) says, "Some years ago I went to see if I could find any indications of Dr. Browne's residence there. It happened to be shortly after a heavy fall of snow, and it was with great difficulty that we made our way through the snowdrifts and reached the spot. The old hall was then a farmhouse, and it has, I believe, been since taken down and replaced by two cottages. It stood high up on the hill-side overlooking the valley. Entering the house through a double porch of hewn stone, we were then shown the carved oak ceiling of the kitchen, which had been lime-washed, then we saw an inscription cut into the stone over the fireplace, containing the letters J. S. F., and the date 1626. The date, no doubt, points to the reconstruction of the house; the letters signify the initials of James Foxcroft and his wife Sarah. In the list of the successive Constables of Halifax there is an entry that James Foxcroft, of the Cross, formerly of Upper Shibden Hall, was Constable in 1638. He seems to have built the Hall or added to it, let it to Dr. Browne in 1634, and gone to live in Halifax."

There can be no doubt that the wooded glades of Shibden-Dale ministered by their quiet beauty to the composition of his greatest and most eloquent work. It certainly was written in 1634 and 1635, and must have been completed before October 19th of the latter year, inasmuch as he attained his thirtieth year on that day, and he was desirous enough that the readers of "Religio Medici" should be made acquainted with the incident, for three times in that book does he allude to the circumstance. "Nor hath my pulse beat thirty years." "My life is a miracle of thirty years." "As yet I have not seen one revolution of Saturn." This planet makes but one revolution in thirty years.

The fact of Sir Thomas Browne having resided at Shibden Hall is confirmed by what he says in his first edition of that work, 1643:—"It was penned in such a place and with such disadvantages that (I protest) from the first setting of pen to paper I had not the assistance of any good book."

The selection of Shibden-Dale was intended by Sir Thomas as a tranquil retreat in which to recruit his health, somewhat impaired by having suffered the perils of shipwreck, and by the four years' wanderings in France, Spain, Holland, and Italy. In the latter country it is not unlikely that he contracted some form of malarial disease, which may have lingered in his system for a long time, as it did in those days when preventive treatment was unknown.

The Vale also afforded him the rest he required to compose "that piece of serene wisdom." It was never dreamt of by him as a place in which to begin the practice of his profession, as so many have thought. Had this been his intent, he would have chosen, not a remote spot on the hill-side, three miles from the principal town (Halifax), but gone into the town itself.

It was for the same reason that Carlyle sought the gloom of Craigenputtock, and lived there seven years. We now know that the first work which caught the ear of the world was done in this mountain solitude. He knew that sunshine is not more necessary to vegetation than tranquil days to great thoughts.

A view of the stone porch of New Hall, Elland, near Halifax, once the residence of Dr. Henry Power, the intimate friend of Sir Thomas Browne. Persons are living in the neighbourhood who well remember Upper Shibden Hall before it was pulled down thirty years ago. They state that Upper Shibden Hall was precisely similar to New Hall, Elland, with this difference, that the former had two large round ornamental stones on the piers on each side of the entrance; the latter had not. These stones are still in existence in the village of Northowram.





Religio Medici.

A Facsimile of the first page of a Manuscript Copy of the "Religio Medici."

The manuscript was written by Sir Thomas Browne himself; it is very perfect, in excellent preservation and with another copy quite as complete, with very few corrections, has been presented to the City of Norwich by Mrs. Martin Hood Wilkin, to be deposited with many other rare copies of Browne's works, in the Castle Museum.

The MS. is in small quarto, has 186 pages, and about twenty-four lines to a page. It is written in a large, clear, legible hand, and originally without title. In a different hand, at the head of the first page, are the words *Religio Medici*, and on the preceding fly-leaf a long Latin inscription, from which it is evident that the work was widely circulated while in manuscript, some years earlier than 1641, or it would not have been attributed by its possessor to Dr. Read, who died in that year.

Six manuscript copies of "Religio Medici" are known to be in existence. One preserved in the British Museum, which, unfortunately, is a fragment, but interesting as possessing a date—1639—three years earlier than the first spurious edition—1642. It differs very much from all the others.

A copy preserved in the Rawlinson Collection at the Bodleian Library, very similar to the Norwich copy, but is different from all printed copies.

A copy in Pembroke College Library at Oxford, "one of the treasures of the Library," presented in 1783 by the Rev. T. Wrigley, M.A. A copy in the possession of Dr. De Haviland Hall, of Wimpole Street, London, and two complete copies in Norwich.

The "Religio Medici" was not intended for publication; it was composed at "leisurable times" for his "private exercise and satisfaction," and ample proof has been given of the book having been repeatedly transcribed *while in manuscript*. Simon Wilkin observes:—"I am perfectly satisfied that Sir Thomas Browne had several originals written by his own hand differing from each other." This opinion is confirmed by the information of those who knew him, 'That it was his constant practice to make repeated copies of his compositions,' and there is sufficient evidence too that he was very willing to lend out his works in manuscript, and on one occasion he complains that they were never returned. It is, therefore, easily to be supposed that one of those copies of "Religio Medici," which he had lent, found its way to the press, and was printed without his knowledge or assent, and without his name attached to it, early in 1642.

Although the book was published anonymously, it attracted attention in an extraordinary degree, so much so that it was reprinted in the course of a few months, and thus Sir Thomas Browne was compelled to issue "A true and full copy of that which was most imperfectly and surreptitiously printed." This edition, the first authorized one, appeared in 1643.

The proof of the excellence of the work is to be found in its great success and its fame having so soon spread throughout Europe. At the end of the present year it will have passed through sixty editions. Thirty-five treatises have been written in imitation of it. Coleridge describes the book as a fine portrait of a handsome man in his best clothes, and then says it is a delicious book.

It is upon this work that Sir Thomas Browne's fame chiefly rests. It was his first and most celebrated.

Religio Medicis.

For my Religion though there be
several circumstances that might au-
perswade the world I have done at all;
At the generall standall of my profession
the naturall course of my Studies, the
indiferentie of my behaviour, & discourse
in matter of Religion, neither violently
offending one nor with the Common
ardour of contention opposing another
yett in despite hereof I dare (without
insupposition) affirm the Honorable Title
of a Christian. Not that I merely owe
this title to the Font, my Education,
or ethyme wherein I was borne either
to confirm thes Principles my Parents
infilled into my memory understanding
or by a generall conserue receiv'd in the
Religion of my Country. But that having
in my riper yeare and confirmed
judgement, seen and examined all I
find my selfe obligeid by the Principles
of Grace, and the Lawe of my owne
reason to embrake not other name but
that. Neither doth Reut in my Deal-

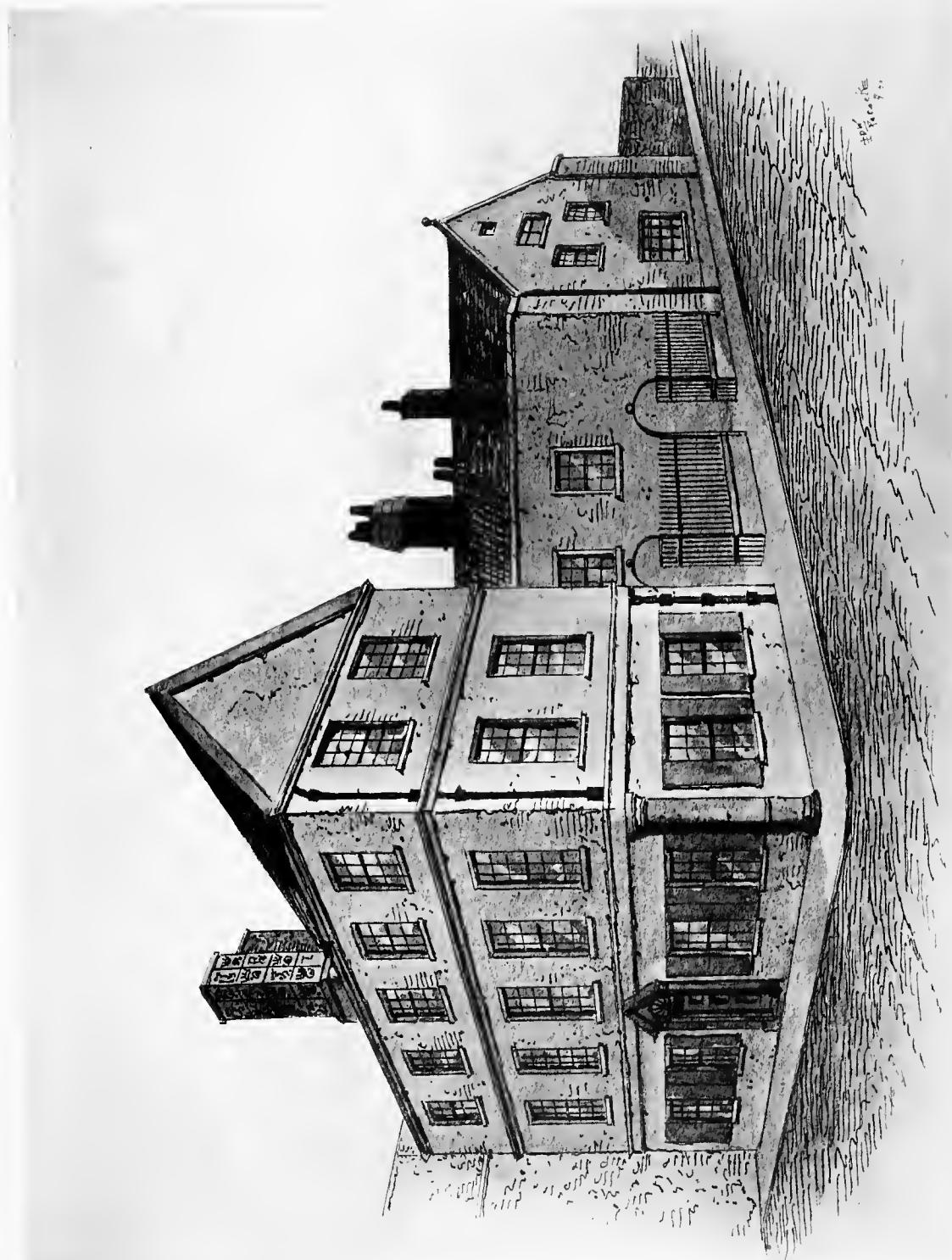
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The Residence of Sir Thomas Browne.

The Residence, as it existed in the days in which Sir Thomas Browne lived, and which formed his home for thirty-two years. It was an extensive but plain building of three stories, situated in the parish of St. Peter Mancroft, at the extreme south end of the Market Place. The front faced the Haymarket, and the side formed a part of what is now known as Orford Place.

Sir Thomas Browne took possession of the house in September, 1650. The previous owner was a Mr. Alexander Anguish, Mayor of Norwich, of whom Sir Thomas Browne purchased it. Where the worthy Knight resided from 1636 to 1650 remains a perfect mystery to this day. The earliest entry in the Register of St. Peter Mancroft of a birth in his family, is that of his daughter Frances, his seventh child, on the 7th of November, 1650.

Sir Thomas Browne established a museum in this house, and became a collector of all kinds of natural history. John Evelyn visited him in October, 1671, and describes "his whole house and garden as being a paradise and cabinet of varieties, especially medals, books, plants, and natural things, and a collection of the eggs of all the birds of Norfolk that he could procure. He led me to see all the remarkable places of this ancient city, being one of the largest, and certainly, after London, one of the noblest of England." His stuffed birds were unfortunately destroyed by the person who had charge of his house during the time that the plague was raging in the parish.



The Drawing-room in Sir Thomas Browne's Residence.

In this room was placed the exquisite piece of carved woodwork over the mantelpiece described on the next page.

The room is wainscoted and the ceiling richly moulded. The house itself was void of ornament externally, but no doubt richly furnished internally. In 1682 the building was assessed at £27, the Easter rate being £4, and the Reparation rate £1 2s. 6d.

Sir Thomas died in this house, October 19th, 1682, and was buried in the chancel of his parish church on the 24th. Lady Browne continued to reside in the house until her death in 1685. After this event it was sold by Dr. Edward Browne to Dr. Roger Howman, of the "Red Well," Norwich, to whose son, Dr. Edward Howman, it was transferred in 1705. After his retirement in 1745 to the adjoining parish of St. Stephen, the house passed into the hands of a Mr. William Beloe, who converted the ground floor into a china and glass warehouse. In 1845 the whole of it was demolished, and a Savings' Bank took its place—another instance of the conversion of lead into gold. And in time this had to give way to an invisible and more subtle agent.

The Rev. William Beloe, author of "The Sexagenarian," "Anecdotes of Literature and Scarce Books," "The Biographical Dictionary," in fifteen volumes, and many other works, was born in the above house.



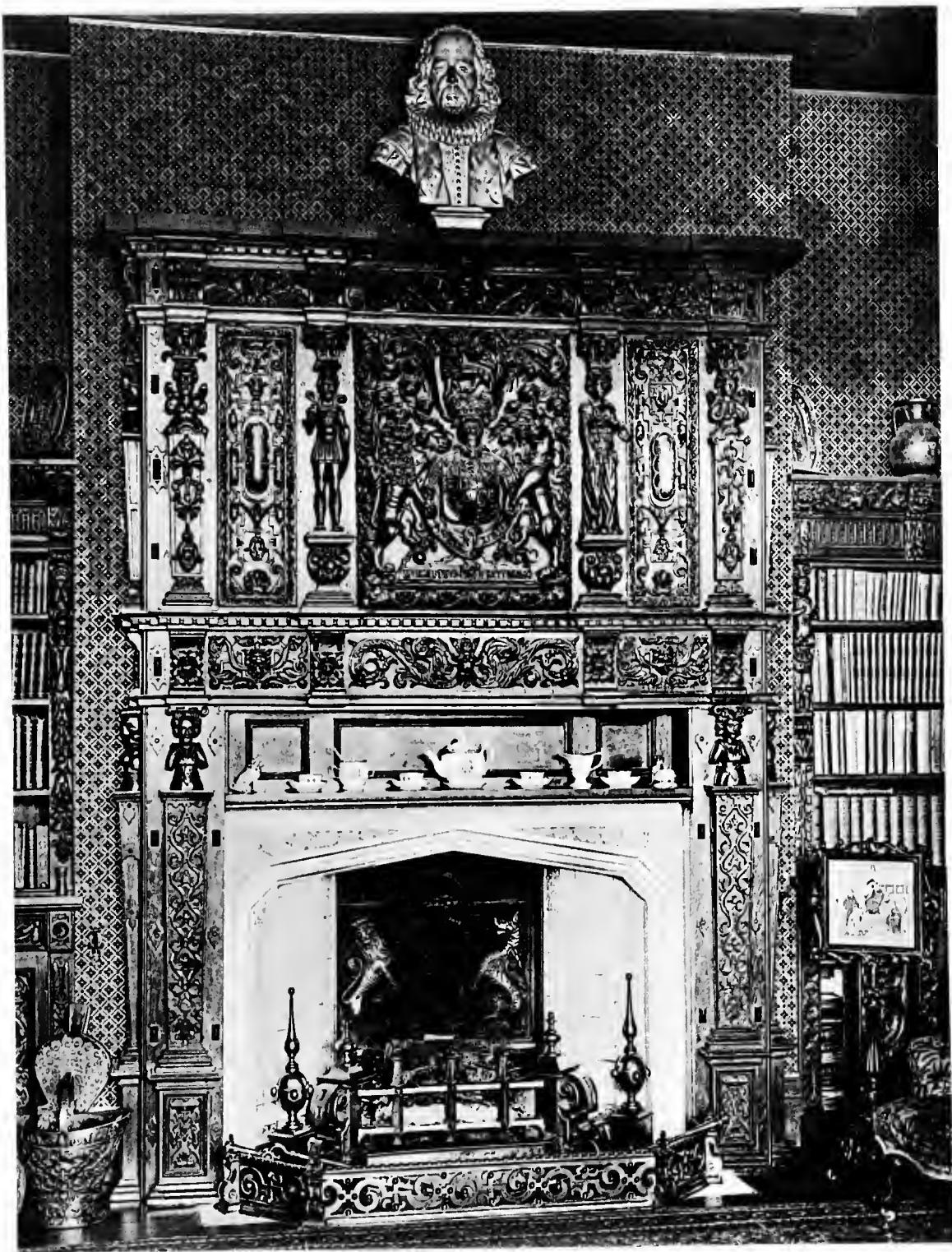
The Oak Carving in the Drawing-room of Sir Thomas Browne's Residence.

This consists of a handsome and elaborate piece of woodwork carved in the style of the revived classical taste which prevailed in the earlier part of the 17th century, it is seven feet in breadth by five feet in depth, and occupied the entire space from the mantelpiece to the ceiling.

It decorated one of the principal chambers in the residence in which Sir Thomas Browne lived. Simon Wilkin says it was placed in the drawing-room, and without doubt he is correct, as he must have frequently seen it.

In the centre is a richly ornamented carving in oak of the Royal Arms of Charles II., unquestionably placed there by Sir Thomas Browne to express his feeling of loyalty, and to commemorate the Knighthood which was conferred on him by the King on his visit to Norwich, September 28th, 1671. At the base of the carving the following words occur, "O God arise, and scatter our enemies." On each side of the central piece is placed a large boss of yellow onyx, said to have been sent to Sir Thomas by his son Edward when on his travels.

On the demolition of the house in 1845, this piece of carved work was purchased by the late Henry Birkbeck, Esq., and placed in the library of the Hall at Stoke Holy Cross, near Norwich, where it still remains.

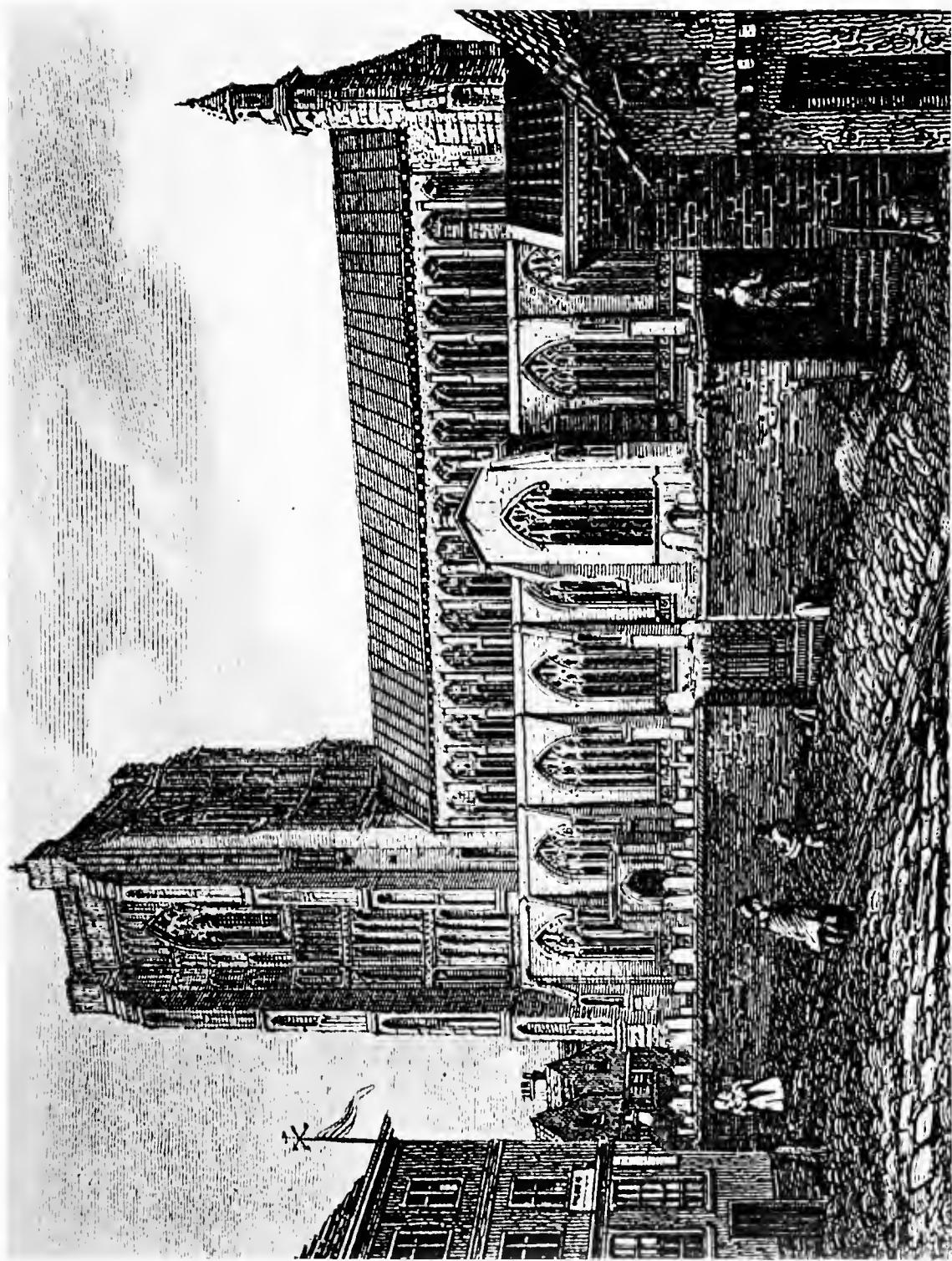


The Church of St. Peter Mancroft.

This parish, at the beginning of the Confessor's reign, was an entire field. At the end of his reign it began to be inhabited, and the part now called the Market Place was the "*Magna Crofta Castelli*," the great croft or close, used for pasture.

In 1390 a church stood here; this was demolished and the present one built, and finished in 1455. It is the finest parochial church in the city, of which this is the principal parish.

The view of it represents the building as it was in the days of Sir Thomas Browne. His close and lifelong friend, the Rev. John Whitefoot, says: "He attended the public service very constantly, when he was not withheld by his practice; never missed the Sacrament in his parish, if he were in town; read the best English sermons he could hear of, with liberal applause; and delighted not in controversies." It is questionable whether he attended the church during the incumbency of John Carter, who was minister for some years during the Civil Wars. Carter was a red-hot Puritan, and hated Episcopalians, Independents, and Quakers with an impartial hatred. The title of one of his sermons was, "The nail hit on the head and driven into the City and Cathedral wall of Norwich;" and another, "A rare sight, or the Lion sent from a far country and presented to the City of Norwich." "Many of you can be lions—very courageous, so long as you have a castle over you, not otherwise."



The Monument to the Memory of Sir Thomas Browne.

Sir Thomas Browne died October 19th, 1682, the day of his nativity; as did Shakespeare, Raphael, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. Upon this circumstance Sir Thomas observes, "That the first day should make the last, that the Tail of the Snake should return into its Mouth precisely at that time, and they should wind up upon the day of their Nativity, is indeed a remarkable Coincidence, which the Astrology hath taken witty pains to salve, yet hath it been very wary in making Predictions of it."

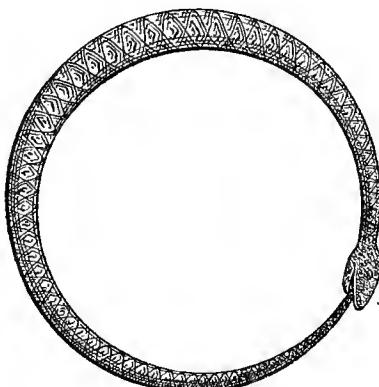
Sir Thomas was buried in a vault in which many of his family had been interred, situated on the south side of the chancel of St. Peter Mancroft. On one of the south pillars, there is a Monument to his memory erected by Lady Dorothy Browne, "who had been his affectionate wife for 41 years."

To show the estimation in which this learned man was held by his contemporaries, it is only necessary to quote the concluding words of the inscription on his Monument:—"Per Orbem Notissimus, Vir Pientissimus, Integerrimus, Doctissimus."

On the opposite pillar of the chancel is a mural Monument to the memory of Lady Browne, who died February 24th, 1685, aged 63:—

"Reader, thou maist believe this pious stone,
It is not common dust thou treadst upon,
'Tis hallowed earth," etc.

These lines were composed by her son, Dr. Edward Browne, Physician to Charles II., and President of the Royal College of Physicians, as well as Physician to Saint Bartholomew's Hospital.





The Coffin Plate.

An impression taken from the coffin plate commemorative of Sir Thomas Browne. It is in the form of an heraldic scutcheon, seven inches in length by six in breadth. It had been carefully preserved by the late Mr. Robert Fitch, and after his death it was restored by his relatives to the Church of St. Peter Mancroft, in the vestry of which it is now placed.

On opening the vault belonging to the Browne family in the chancel of the Church of St. Peter Mancroft, in August, 1840, the workmen accidentally broke the lid of the coffin containing the skeleton of Sir Thomas Browne. Mr. R. Fitch, who was present at the time, observes: "This circumstance afforded me an opportunity of inspecting the remains of that great man. The bones of the skeleton were in good preservation, particularly those of the skull; the brain was considerable in quantity, quite brown and unctuous; the hair profuse and perfect, of a fine auburn colour. The coffin plate, which was also broken into two nearly equal halves, was of brass, and in the form of a shield; it bore the following inscription:—

Amplissimus Vir
D^{as} Thomas Browne Miles Medicinæ
D Annos Natus 77 Denatus 19 Die
Mensis Octobris, Anno Dⁿⁱ. 1682.
Hoc loculo indormiens, Corporis Spagirici
Pulvere Plumbrum in Aurum
Convertit."

Sleeping in this coffin, by the dust of his alchemic body,
he converts the lead into gold.

Amiens
D'Annes B. s. MOLING
D' Annes Natus s. Sanctus 12 die
Mensis Octobris anno 1682 sic
Oculo in dormientem cursum suum
Esti puerum amicum cursum
Convenit

The Statue.

Foremost amongst the names of those of literary ability and eminence associated with Norwich, stands prominently that of Sir Thomas Browne, whose works have placed him in a distinguished position as a great thinker.

It had been considered by many of his admirers that we had too long neglected to do honour to so learned a scholar of the seventeenth century, and that a special memorial ought to be placed in the city in which he passed two-thirds of his life, and in which most of his works were written.

In 1897 this idea took a practical shape. A few citizens met and appointed a large and influential committee; from this a few gentlemen were selected to whom the subject was ultimately referred, and they formed the Executive Committee.

After several meetings the Committee finally decided that the most suitable form of memorial, and one which would be most acceptable not only to the citizens of Norwich, but to all admirers of Sir Thomas Browne, should be in the form of a bronze statue. This proposal met with the most hearty approbation of all persons interested in the matter, and at once received very influential support, medical and general.

At the end of seven years a sufficiently large sum of money had been raised to justify the Committee in selecting a sculptor. Mr. Henry Pegram, A.R.A., was the artist whose design of a statue commended itself to the majority of the Committee as being the most appropriate for the purpose, and to him the commission was entrusted.

A site in the Haymarket, which had lately been restored to its former state of an open space, was granted by the Town Council. On that site the Memorial Statue was placed, and unveiled by Lord Avebury, October 19th, 1905.

This view of the statue is taken from the original clay mould.



The Palace of the Duke of Norfolk.

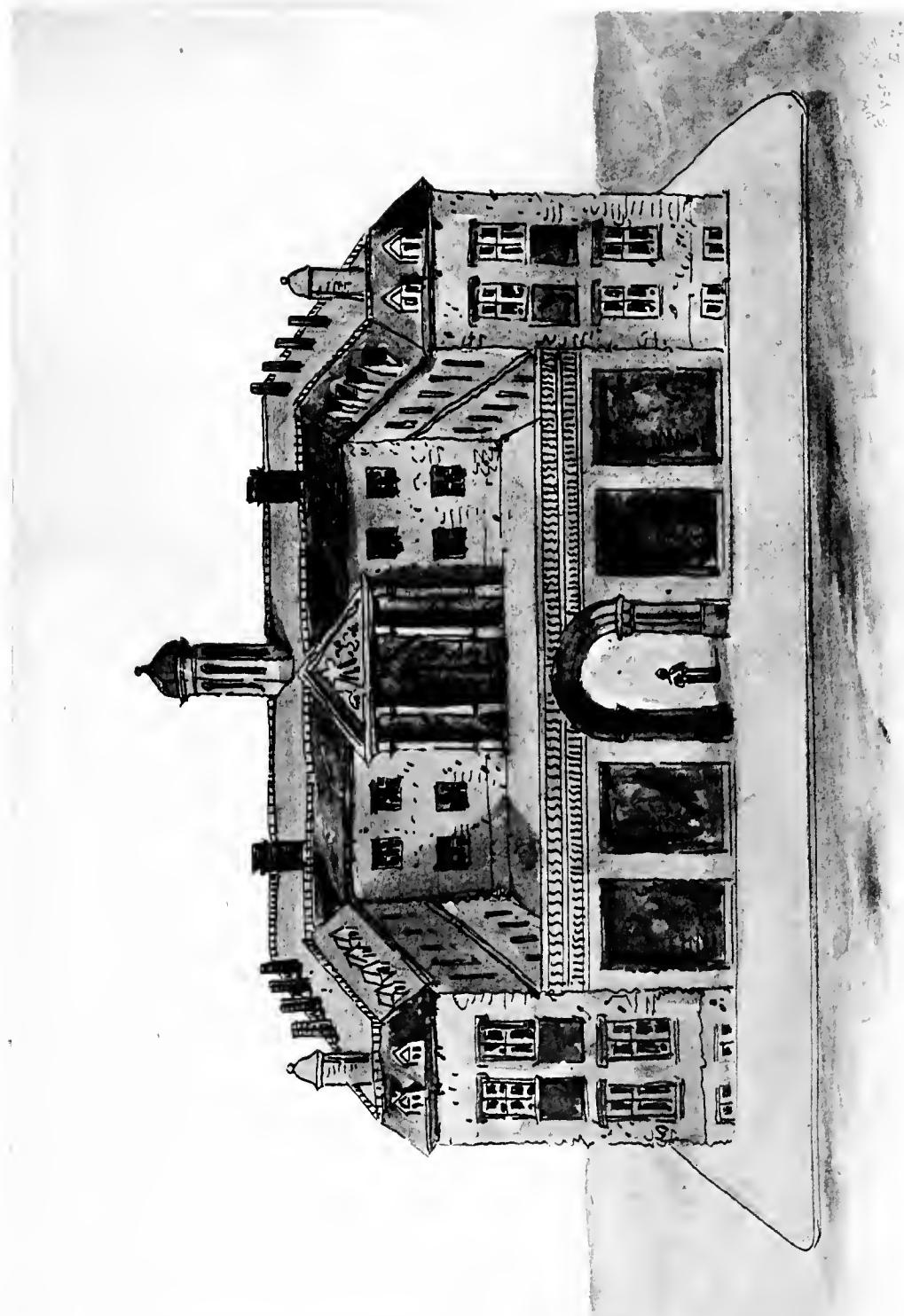
This represents the Palace with its courtyard, situated on the east side of Duke Street; it covered a large space of ground and extended so far as the river.

In 1602 the old palace was demolished, and the new one built by Henry Howard, created Lord Howard of Castle Rising in 1669, subsequently —1672—Earl of Norwich, and Earl Marshal of England. On the death of his brother in 1677, he became the sixth Duke of Norfolk. He was the grandson of Thomas, the celebrated Earl of Arundel, whose collection of marbles and other treasures was presented by him, at the suggestion of John Evelyn, to the University of Oxford, and his grandfather's library, which was valued at £10,000, he gave to the Royal Society. Evelyn describes the magnificence of the Palace, its collection of choice jewels, rare cabinets, pictures, tapestries, and plate, the very drinking cups of gold, and even the fireirons of silver, and the almost regal state maintained by the Earl, which Evelyn mentions as surpassing the grandeur of any prince in Europe. Dr. Fuller tells us that it was the largest palace he had ever seen out of London.

In September, 1671, Charles II. and his Court were sumptuously entertained at this splendid mansion. It was on this occasion that the abilities of Sir Thomas Browne were appreciated, and his loyalty rewarded by the King conferring on him the honour of Knighthood.

The property originally existed in the form of tenements, and belonged to Alan Percy, a priest, whose portrait is to be seen in the Guildhall Norwich. He was brother to the Earl of Northumberland, of whom the property was purchased by the Duke of Norfolk. The whole of this magnificent pile of buildings was demolished in 1708 by the grandson of Henry Howard who died in 1684.

The sketch is taken from a rare print to be found in Mrs. Madder's "Handbook of Norwich," 1857.





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"Sir Thomas Browne, M.D., has enjoyed a reputation as one of the most quaint, most learned, and most fascinating writers of an age in which literary fame was not gained so easily as it is now. Mr. Southwell's notes are both valuable and acute. Perhaps the best recommendation of this interesting book will be found in an extract from the early pages, which shows very clearly how far ahead of his generation was the author of '*Religio Medici*'."—*Country Life*.

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